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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ISTANBUL 000499

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: PUBLIC INTELLECTUALS URGE VIGOROUS ERGENEKON
PROSECUTION

REF: A. ANKARA 1194

[1B](#). ANKARA 1217

[1C](#). ANKARA 1223

[1D](#). ANKARA 1337

[1E](#). ANKARA 680

[1F](#). PORTICO 19 FEBRUARY 2008

[1G](#). 04 ANKARA 6000

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL SHARON A. WIENER FOR REASONS 1.4(B), (D)

[11](#). (C) Summary. Conversations with professors at various Istanbul universities reveal a fear among the left-wing intelligentsia that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Turkey's military establishment have arrived at a modus vivendi that, in order to protect the interests of both, will result in a detrimental limitation of the so-called "Ergenekon" prosecution. End summary.

A Public Call for Vigorous Investigation

[12](#). (U) On August 14, a statement appeared in several national papers, signed by some 300 artists, journalists, academics and civil society actors, regarding the so-called "Ergenekon" indictment (Refs A-D). In relevant part, the statement reads: "Despite its shortcomings and some of its controversial aspects, the indictment includes very important accusations and documents, and by deepening the investigation, democracy can benefit from a chance that was missed after the Susurluk and Semdinli incidents" (Ref D). The statement further "calls upon all of Turkey's institutions, both civilian and military, to show the necessary determination to keep the case alive and follow it to reveal the rest of Ergenekon's connections."

[13](#). (C) Comment. The "Susurluk incident" of 1996 arose out of a fatal car accident, as a result of which it was learned that the Deputy Chief of the Istanbul Police was intimately involved with organized crime figures. The "Semdinli incident"

of 2005 involved a bombing in the eponymous town, officially attributed to the PKK but widely believed to have been committed by Turkish Jandarma provocateurs. As noted in Ref D, "Both cases evaporated without serious legal consequences for those allegedly involved." End Comment.

[14](#). (U) Many Turks view the Ergenekon prosecution as the AKP's response to the (recently terminated) AKP closure case (Ref C). We accordingly met with three signatories of the statement, senior professors at local universities, to find out why they think the AKP might not have the "necessary determination to keep the case alive and follow it": Sevket Pamuk, Professor of Economics and Economic History at Bogazici University (and

older brother of Nobel Prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk); Halil Berkay, Professor of History at Sabanci University; and Murat Belge, Professor of Comparative Literature at Istanbul Bilgi University. All have extensive teaching experience at major U.S. universities and are very well-regarded in their fields of endeavor. All are self-described "leftists" with little sympathy for the social policies of the center-right the AKP, but recognize that for the time being there is in Turkey no serious alternative to the AKP. As They begrudgingly support the AKP, in the hope that its success will lead to EU accession for Turkey and thus firmly ground Turkey in the West.

¶5. (C) All three professors stated that they, like many of their co-signers, were concerned that the AKP and the Turkish military had already or might in the future strike a deal, whereby in exchange for the AKP not pursuing the Ergenekon investigation "all the way," the military would cease or moderate its attacks on the AKP policies.

Ergenekon Rooted in Turkey's "Love-Hate" Relationship with the West

¶6. (U) Professor Berkay offered a detailed exposition of the historical underpinnings of the Ergenekon conspiracy.

According to Berkay, since the 19th century Turkey and before

it the Ottoman Empire has had a "love-hate" relationship with the West. Even Ataturk, he said, the great Occidentalist, tolerated a certain degree of anti-Westernism within Turkish nationalism, believing it necessary for the creation of a

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unified Turkish identity. According to Berkay, Turkish nationalists chose independence over liberty and eventually the Western values of liberty and human rights came to be seen

as a treasonous plot to divide Turks. During the cold war, this anti-Western strain was suppressed, because Turkey had to make common cause with the West. However, with the fall of Communism, and with Europe's increasingly vocal demands that Turkey honor human rights (particularly minority rights), this "bruised and defiant" Turkish anti-Western nationalism was revitalized.

¶7. (U) According to Berkay, this anti-Western nationalism found a receptive host in the Turkish military which, from the time of Demirel and Ciller (in the mid-1990s), and under justification of the war against the PKK, started to claim a priority in setting national policy. Throughout the 1990s, said Berkay, the military was backing an "increasingly puerile and absurd series of coalitions," in an attempt to maintain its position. When the AKP came to power in 2002, Ergenekon "came into its own," and its influence reached to the very top ranks of the military. In 2005, in response to the de-emphasis of the National Security Council (Ref G), the military leaders began to hold weekly press conferences, expostulating on all kinds of policy questions - acting, said Berkay, as an alternative government. The media magnified this "national line" and the Ergenekon nucleus was able to operate under this "umbrella."

¶8. (U) Shortly after the military's aborted "e-coup" of April, 2007, Prime Minister Erdogan met with then-JCS Chairman Buyukanit. The purpose of that meeting has never been made public, and speculation in the press runs the gamut from innocent to conspiratorial (such as the theory of former minister Fikrei Saglar that the PM blackmailed Buyukanit with a file of extraordinary spendings by his wife). Ten weeks later, the AKP achieved a stunning victory in the general elections and, said Berkay, "the wind went out of the sails" of the nationalists, and the military began "delinking" itself from Ergenekon.

¶9. (U) On June 24, 2008, six weeks before the August 1 High Military Council (YAS) meeting at which General Basbug was expected to be named as Buyukanit's successor, Erdogan met with Basbug. A short official statement after the meeting said the two discussed the fight against terrorism and "some

issues that recently came to the agenda." Press speculation is that those issues included the closure case, Ergenekon, and Basbug's future.

The Theory: High-Level Military Involvement in Semdinli...

¶10. (C) Berkay's theory is that Erdogan had proof of Basbug's involvement in the Semdinli incident of November 2005, and used it to force the military to stop protecting Ergenekon supporters within the military. As evidence that Buyukanit, Basbug and Erdogan reached an accommodation, Berkay points to two extraordinary occurrences: First, the military permitted civilian authorities to arrest two four star generals living on a military compound (Refs A, D). (The military had for years refused to assist civilian prosecutors investigating Ergenekon, asserting that the military justice system had sole jurisdiction over any crimes committed by military personnel.) Second, in its August 1 meeting, YAS failed (for the first time in 12 years) to expel any officers for anti-secular activities. And, of course, notes Berkay, the Constitutional Court (which includes among its members at least one former military officer) decided not to ban the AKP.

¶11. (C) While Berkay recognizes that it may not be in the best interests of the AKP to pursue the Ergenekon investigation to the bitter end, he believes that neither Turkish democracy, nor the AKP itself, can survive "another cover-up." Thus, the investigation must be pursued sufficiently far, and obtain sufficiently detailed confessions, that such extreme nationalism will not rise up again. Berkay is cautiously optimistic that this outcome will be achieved.

... But A Simpler Theory Fits the Facts

¶12. (C) Comment. Berkay's theory that the Ergenekon conspiracy reached the highest levels of the TGS (cf. Ref. F) suffers from the common fault that a simpler explanation accounts for the known facts: It is in the mutual interests

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of the AKP and the Turkish General Staff to find a modus vivendi (Refs B, E). While many in the military undoubtedly loathe the AKP, they surely recognize, in light of the wide public support that the party enjoys, that closing it would be but a temporary victory. And, given the military's ongoing spat with the People's Republican Party (CHP), the military does not currently have any alternative to the AKP. At the same time, the humiliation to the military of having many of its officers, including two retired four star generals, sentenced to long prison terms for coup plotting would be unbearable; indeed, such a result probably would be unacceptable as well to a wide swath of the voting public, which reveres the military.

¶13. (C) Comment Continued. The AKP, for its part, has a great desire to neutralize the military in the AKP's fight against the traditional ruling elite. Such a victory likely would be viewed by the AKP as well worth the cost of limiting Ergenekon convictions to lower-level conspirators. As long as the outcome of the case is not seen to be a complete sham, most Turks likewise probably would be more than happy to see the Ergenekon investigation resolved in a manner analogous to that in which the AKP closure case was resolved: With penalties imposed but without mortal harm done. End comment.

WIENER